

ENFIELD'S lead at the top of the Isthmian League was cut back to 14 points by Wycombe Wanderers on Saturday after their deserved 2-1 victory over Tooting and Mitcham at Sandy Lane.

Although the leaders are still a long way clear, Wanderers must keep plugging away at their heels in the hope that something upsets the Southbury Road juggernaut. They lost for the first time in 36 matches at Blyth in the F.A. Cup on Saturday.

The Blues' latest win followed their 3-0 hammering of Slough on New Year's Eve and manager John Reardon seems to have found the right combination in midfield and to a lesser extent upfront. Wanderers will be tested at home to Hitchin later this month but if they can make it nine points out of nine, it will be a fine achievement.

This win at Tooting was particularly satisfactory as Wycombe lost 2-0 at home to the same club near the start of the season. On this occasion, however, Tooting were without two key players while in my opinion, their manager erred in dropping Alan Ives to substitute in

Tooting and Mitcham 1, Wycombe Wanderers 2

REPORT BY STUART EARP

order to give newly signed Peter McGillicuddy his debut. Ives has proved the scourge of Wanderers in the past and indeed, scored one of the two goals at Loakes Park this season. The absentees were certainly missed by a weakened Tooting side.

Wanderers made only one change to their team, Derek Harris replacing the injured Dylan Evans with Roger Day as sub. Harris, after a poor start, was rewarded for his usual high work rate with a goal — his first in the league since October 1.

In a solid team performance, Mick Holifield caught the eye with his best display for some time while Paul Birdseye was in marvellous form at right back. His defensive partners Keith Mead and Alan Phillips were towers of strength in the middle while John Priestley continued his improvement.

NO ATMOSPHERE

At the start, however, neither side looked at their best and the first half was riddled with errors that did little to warm the crowd. Despite a reasonable attendance, there was little or no atmosphere at Sandy Lane and this seemed to affect the players.

Des Dennis showed his full repertoire of skills on the ball but neither goalkeeper was seriously troubled. Tooting kept Peter Spittle busy collecting a string of long passes while Wycombe's attacks, although more constructive, lacked penetration inside the penalty area. Neither side was helped by a tacky pitch well laced with sand.

Tooting got behind the Wycombe defence on only two occasions while the Blues' best effort came from Phillips, whose side-foot shot from Howard Kennedy's low cross was well taken by John Dunn in the 41st minute.

Things changed dramatically for the better after the interval and the first five minutes of the second half contained more goalmouth incident than the whole of the previous 45.

In the 48th minute a crossfield pass by the out of sorts Bobby Davies was intercepted by John Keefe who put Dennis away. Spittle, however, was equal to the shot and parried well. Thirty seconds later at the other end Graham Mackenzie broke through inside the box but saw his shot cannon back off an upright. A miscue by Holifield and a drive from Derek Casey that struck the side netting completed a tense opening 10 minutes.

When Kennedy struck the crossbar with a diving header in the 54th minute it seemed Wycombe's luck had deserted them but four minutes later they got the goal they deserved, thanks to Birdseye's skill and persistency. He made a 40 yard run deep into Tooting territory beating four men. It seemed he had lost the ball as it rolled to the bye-line but he pulled it back and crossed. Harris swung and missed but Tony Horseman made no mistake with the loose ball and crashed it high into the net from close range.

With Holifield always dangerous on the left, Wanderers began to play with real confidence, passes flowing neatly across the difficult sur-

face. Horseman put Harris clean through after 68 minutes but Dunn stuck out an arm at the last minute when he looked beaten. It was from the ensuing corner that Wycombe made it 2-0 with a well worked set piece. Holifield swung the flag kick towards the near post where Horseman headed on. Harris raced in and powered in a header which Bobby Green could only help into the net.

Tooting fought back to get back into the game but their play was crying out for more width as they churned through the middle in vain.

In the 76th minute, however, Dave Juneman gave them some hope with a fine goal. Horseman was robbed in midfield and the ball was quickly transferred to Juneman who gave Spittle no chance with a precision shot that curled just inside a post. Juneman, who played in midfield because Keefe scored twice last week, certainly made his point and returned to his usual centre forward role after the goal.

The last 14 minutes gave Wycombe supporters a few anxious moments as the Blues battled to hang on to the lead. It was here that Spittle proved a matchwinner with a superb reaction save five minutes from the end when he tipped over Dennis's point blank header from Juneman's cross. After that Wanderers survived the last few minutes to deservedly take the three points at stake.

TOOTING: J. Dunn, K. Highland, R. Pittaway, C. Woffenden, R. Green, D. Casey (sub A. Ives 80 mins), D. Juneman, T. Ford, P. McGillicuddy, J. Keefe, D. Dennis.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies, H. Kennedy, J. Priestley, G. Mackenzie, D. Harris, A. Horseman, M. Holifield. Sub R. Day (not used).

Referee: R. Sibley (Reading).
Half-time: 0-0. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Horseman (58), Harris (68). Tooting — Juneman (76).